GRACE

HANS JAKOB

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GRACE

SIX LENTEN DISCOURSES PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF SAINT MARTIN'S AT FREIBURG

BY

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FOREWORD

The present sermons were preached by me during the Lent of 1889. *They have a little history. An old Anglican friend of mine, the Reverend Mr. Green, who was among my hearers kept insisting that I should have them published. In my own judgment however, they contained too little that was new or original to be worthy of publication. When I finally did agree to print them, the first four sermons had disappeared and, with the best will in the world, I could not succeed in discovering them. It was only after an interval of eighteen years that I found them in a package of other MSS. that had already been published.*

On account of the very delicate nature of the theological matters discussed, I put them in the hands of a scholarly and pious theologian, the Capuchin, Father Engelbert, who had assisted me in my pastoral duties and who consented to be judge and critic of the sermons. He found very little in them that needed correction, and strongly counseled publication, in view of their very practical nature. He wrote me: "It will be a regret to me if you do

not publish the sermons. They may continue to do much good even after your death." But two years more elapsed before I managed to incorporate his slight emendations and send the MS. to the press.

So these discourses, well revised, appear now, for the first time, some twenty years after they were originally preached. If they have attained maturity with the passing of years, I shall be content.

It is scarcely necessary to state that the very limited field of my discussion precludes anything like a thorough treatment of the theology of Grace.

HANSJAKOB.

Freiburg, Autumn, 1909.

GRACE

I

In our Lenten reflections of last year, we viewed Christianity externally, beginning at its very foundation and following out the course of its growth and development. In that way, the signs and tokens of its supernatural character became conspicuously clear. This time we shall enter into the inner nature of Christianity and seek for the hidden cause of these wonderful external results,— and we shall, without doubt, recognize that this cause is indeed divine.

Beloved Brethren, If we were wholly ignorant of the doctrine and the history of Christianity and saw nothing but its fruit, surely we should be aware that this fruit has been borne by no earthly tree, but by one whose roots are fast in the soil of Heaven. Of what fruit do I speak? Of the complete transformation of the world, morally, spiritually and socially. Let us consider these facts for a moment.

In the moral world, Christianity has created a new race of men — the saints. This race has totally overcome the evil elements of human nature and has cultivated the field of moral goodness to the very uttermost limits of possibility. The production of such a type of man was an impossibility among the pagans; for they understood the true character neither of virtue nor of holiness. True, we have heard of "The Seven Wise Men of Greece." But we must remember that these were the kind of men who teach goodness indeed, but are wholly unable to demonstrate it by personal example.

Let me quote the great Christian philosopher, Descartes, who says: "The writings of those heathen sages who discuss morals seem to me like splendid palaces built upon sand or marshland. Wonderfully high do they raise virtue; but to practise it they are unable. Often enough we find that they give the name of 'virtue' to what is really nothing but high-mindedness, or even pride, or despair, or perhaps an actual crime, such as parricide."

Of renunciation, of self-denial in the Christian sense, the pagans knew nothing; and the most virtuous of their heroes would not make even passable Christians.

It was said by Voltaire, that notorious free-

thinker, "Among the heathen, the human virtues were already in existence; but among Christians we see the divine."

To-day, likewise, Christianity can challenge unbelievers and scoffers, "Where are the saints produced by your doctrines and your dogmas?" Those men who are most honored by the world are very small, when set side by side with the Christian saints. And small, indeed, they must be, because they are without that true greatness which results from virtue and godliness.

Again,— the spiritual world has been transformed by Christianity. We men of the present day are very vain of the light of reason. Yet in what deep darkness does that reason leave us when we ask it: "Whence have I come?" "Whence came the world?" "What is my destiny?" "Whither do we go?"

These questions do not permit of a satisfactory answer, unless they are considered in the light of Christian faith which tells us of God and thus makes all puzzles and all wonders intelligible.

Faith satisfies the inevitable human need of a glimpse into the mysteries of the other world. It liberates reason from the fetters of doubt and despair; it enriches the spirit with new truth; it answers our greatest problems; and, above all, it sheds

light upon the origin of the evil which has come upon man as a consequence of the Fall. And that Christ, simple of soul and lowly as He was, knew more about the highest truths than the great sages did, will be admitted even by a Voltaire.

In the third place, my friends, Christianity has achieved a blessed transformation in the social world. It has taught men that they are all children of One Father Who is in Heaven and that thus man belongs not only to an earthly, but also to a heavenly kingdom; and that, of these two kingdoms, the heavenly is infinitely the higher. The effect of these doctrines has been to strike off the shackles of slavery previously worn by two-thirds of the human race; to shatter the omnipotence of the State; and to put an end to a social inequality that had been nothing short of frightful.

In a true sense, and in the best sense, then, Christianity has been the mother of liberty, equality and fraternity. To it our nations owe not only their freedom, but their pre-eminence over non-Christian peoples in every sort of culture.

And now comes the question: By what means did Christianity accomplish these world-transformations? There can be but one answer. It was by Grace.

And what is Grace?

That can more easily be felt than expressed. Grace is like the sun, of whose essence we know nothing; although by means of its light we see all that is visible, and although we recognize its heat in a thousand forms. Indeed, Grace bears a striking likeness to the sun; for what the sun does in our natural bodily life, Grace does in our spiritual and supernatural life.

Without the sun there can be no life on the earth. For us and for all other creatures, the sources of life are in the sun's light and the sun's heat. Let its heat be withdrawn for but one day, and every living thing instantly would sink into the icy coldness of death. So, too, without the light of the sun, we should be helpless and inactive. Our very notions of space and of time would vanish into the darkness; and the human lot would become forever one of despair. Hence, Holy Scripture speaks of eternal light as the destiny of the good and of eternal darkness as the destiny of the wicked.

Thus also, is it with Grace. The sources of our supernatural life lie in its light and heat. Bereft of Grace, we should remain without light on the dark problems of life and we should go wandering aimlessly in a spiritual night. Saint John aptly says of Christ, the Man-God, the Mediator of all Grace:

"In Him was Life and the Life was the Light of men. . . . That was the true Light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world." (John i, 5 and 9.)

And Our Savior Himself cried out:

"I am the Light of the world. He that followeth Me walketh not in darkness." (John viii, 12.)

Moreover, Grace, like the sun, gives not merely light, but heat as well; that is to say, strength and love. In our bodily life, we get strength from the sun's heat, without which we could not even hold an object in our frozen fingers. So, in our spiritual life, Grace gives us Love, with the help of which we can do all things,— for Love is stronger than death.

Saint Augustine had had intimate experience of the sublimest kinds of Grace; and he calls Grace an inflowing of divine love influencing us to do the good we know. But, as love is more readily felt than described, we can know little about the essence of Grace,— as indeed, we also can know little about the essence of the sun.

The Church teaches that Grace is an inner, supernatural help bestowed on us by God, through the merits of Christ, for our eternal salvation.

That Jesus Christ is the Source of all Grace, He Himself, affirms in His words to Saint John:

"I am the vine; you the branches: he that abideth

in Me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for without Me you can do nothing." (John xv, 5.)

And that the Grace of Christ is not merely light but, above all, love, He tells us when He says:

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to Myself." (John xii, 32.)

How has He drawn all men to Himself? Surely, through the superhuman love manifested in His death upon the Cross,— the love which by Grace is bestowed upon all men of good-will who love Him for the sake of this sacrifice.

Thus, Grace is our bond of membership with Christ. It is, in the moral world, what the force of gravitation is in the physical world. In the spiritual and religious life of mankind, Grace plays the same wonderful part as, in the natural world, is played by the force which controls the movements of stars and planets.

During the third century before Christ, there lived in the island of Sicily a famous mathematician and physicist, by name, Archimedes. He pledged himself to lift the earth out of place, if he were but given a fulcrum outside the earth from which to work. Because he could get no such fulcrum, this great scientist was unable to move the earth. Yet this is exactly what Jesus Christ has

succeeded in accomplishing. He has drawn the world to Himself and has wholly transformed it spiritually, morally and socially, by means of an unearthly, supernatural, mysterious power which He communicates to His disciples and which is called Grace.

Grace moved the fishermen of the Lake of Genesareth to abandon all and to follow the poor unknown Jesus of Nazareth.

Grace inspired the Apostles to go bravely through the world proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus.

Grace moved the hearts of those who heard to believe the glad tidings.

Grace,— in the earlier, as in the later centuries, — has strengthened martyrs to die in torments rather than to give up their faith in Jesus.

Grace,— throughout the ages, even down to the present day,— has made faithful and kept faithful, millions and millions of Christian confessors.

Grace has created the saints,— the greatest and most wonderful members of the human race.

Yes, Grace it is, beyond all question, that the Church has to thank for the saints, both great and small, whom she counts in such vast numbers. It was one of the very greatest of her saints, Saint Paul, who declared " By the Grace of God I am what I am." (I Cor. xv, 10.)

It is Grace which in every age, rouses up defend-

ers, when the Faith is assailed by unbelieving science.

It is Grace which, at the baptismal font, makes children of God out of the new millions born each year, and consecrates them to a sublime and everlasting life.

It is Grace which, every day and every hour, strengthens millions upon millions of souls in their struggles with the world, with the flesh and with sin.

It is Grace which leads countless numbers of men to approach the Table of the Lord and induces them to believe His promise: "If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever." (John vi, 59.)

It is Grace which removes the stain of sin from the children of Adam and reconciles them to God.

It is Grace which ever and always is providing the Church with new servants and with new priests; which consecrates them, and blesses them, and inspires them to discharge the duties of their holy office.

It is Grace which is continually strengthening for the performance of the duties of their state those men and women who have joined together for the bringing up of a family.

In short, Grace it is, which aids us in the doing of each and every good deed of our whole lives.

Grace gives comfort and courage to the dying

in their last moments upon earth and arms them for that hardest of all conflicts which takes place upon the field of death.

Thus, Dear Brethren, Grace is the very life of the Christian and the very soul of the Christian religion,— its ever active, inner, divine strength.

In one word, Grace, in Christianity, is everything. Yet, at the same time, it remains a mystery with regard to its essence and its way of working. The fact, however, that we witness its working in ourselves and others ought to suffice to make us believe in its existence.

To the fact of its presence and its activity, witness is borne by the very permanence of Christianity down to the present time, despite the battles and the storms encountered during well-nigh twenty centuries. And witness has been continually borne during these long centuries, by all that the world has seen of love, of mercy, of self-denial, of humility, of patience, of repentance, of forgiveness. And we ourselves bear witness; for every prayer that we utter, every good word that falls from our lips to the honor of God and of His Holy Will, every deed that we do to please Him,— all these things are the effects of Grace.

Still, as we have said, the essence of Grace is a mystery and must so remain. And if infidels tell

us that they will believe in Grace when we shall have explained this mystery, we may reply, "It is the law of the universe that visible phenomena come from hidden causes."

We see the sun at work in a thousand different ways; and yet we cannot tell what light is.

We make use of electricity every day; but we do not understand it.

Each instant we use the air, in breathing, in speaking, in hearing; yet we cannot get at its essence.

At the same time, one may give an indirect and remote notion of what Grace is, by referring to a fact which the intelligent unbeliever will not deny. Every reasonable man admits that by nature he is more inclined to evil than to good. With Saint Paul, he must confess:

"I see another law in my members fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members. . . . For the good which I will, I do not; but the evil which I will not, that I do." (Rom. vii, 23 and 19.)

In every man, from his youth up, there is a mysterious inclination to do what is forbidden. The very heathen recognized this and the Roman poet, Ovid, proclaimed it in these words:

"I see and I approve the better things; but I seek the worse."

In opposition to this fatal tendency to sin, Grace makes itself felt in the Christian soul as an inclination to good. Grace is a mysterious, supernatural tendency to goodness, to virtue. By reason of original sin, our nature is depraved and defiled with the desire of sin. The Redemption has blotted out our guilt; and now our lingering tendency to evil is offset by Grace which impels us to virtue and aids us to master our passions.

Grace thus fulfils the desire of the Psalmist who prayed: "Create a clean heart in me, O God, and renew a right spirit within my bowels." (Ps. l, 12.)

And Saint Paul lets us know how powerfully Grace works, when once it has taken hold of a man: "I can do all things in Him Who strengtheneth me." (Philipp. iv, 13.)

Remember, Beloved Brethren, that Grace has never been wanting to man since the Fall, even before the actual Incarnation of Christ. The Word of God, Who in the fullness of time became incarnate, has, from the beginning, been speaking and working in the human conscience,— that same human conscience which the heathen philosopher Plato recognized as an "inner divine spark, the voice, as it were, of God speaking to us."

The God, Who revealed Himself in the Old Tes-

tament was the Divine Word, Jesus Christ. He was the Jehovah Who spoke to the chosen people. The God Who led the children of Israel through the desert was none other than Christ-Jehovah. The God of every revelation and of every grace as well, has always been the Word, "Who was from the beginning with God and by Whom all things were made." (John i, 2 and 3.)

Every good work performed by men before the coming of Christ, no matter how long before, must necessarily have been done with the aid of Grace obtained through the merits of Christ. The greatest of all the results of Grace, however, was to enable men, and to inspire them, actually to practise virtues loftier than anything known to the pagan world. This result was obtained only after the Incarnation of Christ; although, previously to His coming, His future merits had already wrought the pardon and the sanctification of all men of good will.

In the person of Christ was manifested that "true Holy One" to whom Confucius, the ancient founder of the Chinese religion, had looked forward in spirit and of whom he had said, "He shall flood the world with an ocean of worthy deeds."

As a matter of fact, in the Christian dispensation, the Grace of God is wonderfully powerful in every human soul completely thrown open to its influence;

so that each such soul may say with the Apostle Paul, "I can do all things in Him Who strengtheneth me." (Philipp. iv, 13.) Even in these unbelieving times of ours the Grace of Christ raises up souls of an order superior to anything that unfaith with all its science has ever been able to approach, — souls that wage war against avarice, pride and sensuality and, liberated from the thraldom of their passions, follow after the humble, crucified Jesus of Nazareth.

Ask the Sister of Charity who keeps vigil by night at the sick bed of some poor creature,— ask her what makes possible this sort of heroism so indifferent to earthly reward as to compel our admiration. Ask her what enables her to reject the world, with all it offers and to dedicate herself to the service of love in a way unknown upon this poor earth of ours before Christ came and taught us. If you put such a question to her, she will answer, "By the Grace of God, I am what I am." (I Cor. xv, 10.)

Beloved Brethren! There are thousands and thousands of educated people, to-day, who perceive only the outward form of Christianity. Because of the important place it has occupied in human history, they recognize it as something great and honorable. They are aware of the results of its

influence among men. But the inner power that has achieved these results, that which is the very soul of Christianity, namely, Grace,— they do not know at all. And not knowing it, they do not believe in it; for the first and most necessary of graces is Faith itself. Long ago the great French Bishop, Bossuet wrote, "The unbeliever, like a blind man, lacks one of his senses; and this sense can be restored to him by none but God alone." Indeed, there are many calling themselves Christians who "have eyes and see not." They perceive Christianity's external shape and its visible fruits; but of the supernatural power energetic within it, they know nothing and they wish to know nothing.

Beloved Friends! Never, as long as we live, shall we really comprehend the tremendous facts involved in the pardon of sin and the reconciliation of man to God through the death of Christ. Transgression and guiltiness toward God; punishment and expiation both temporal and eternal; creation's groaning to be redeemed and to be reconciled to the Creator,— all this includes more problems and mysteries than the whole visible world. These are mysteries which even angels would be helpless to understand and which can be fully comprehended by God alone.

Before the world existed, the Father resolved to create the universe through the Son,— the Divine

Word,— that the power, the wisdom and the goodness of the Blessed Trinity might be revealed. And when the universe had been created, then, as the Book of Job says, the sons of God (the angels) shouted for joy and the stars of the morning praised God together. (Job xxxviii, 7.) But one among God's creatures, a prince of light, introduced darkness into the midst of everlasting brightness. He set up against God; drew after him a number of his companions, the other sons of God; and finally succeeded in dragging man down with him to destruction.

Can we understand this? Can we fathom the reason why God, Who from all eternity foresaw this catastrophe, did not instantly annihilate the one who became His enemy? Why did He wait until the Lamb without spot had been slain by Satan and the powers of darkness? Why was it not until then that the groaning creation was reconciled to its Creator, and the kingdom of Grace and pardon established?

Can we understand why even now the power of God's enemy is still so great; and why so many men are still unwilling to know anything about Grace or forgiveness?

No; and once again, No!

In the heaven of heavens the eternal decrees of God are uttered, and we men, with our sin-darkened

reason, will never be able to understand the everlasting and the hidden God,— as Scripture names Him. Indeed, God does not ask us to understand or to explain, but only to believe in Him and in His Grace.

The great power still possessed by sin is clear from the history of Grace, that all-powerful revelation of God. God wills to remit all sin and all guilt, and then to bestow Heaven upon the forgiven sinner. But there are men who will not confess that they are sinners and that they need Grace. We hear them to-day speaking of self-redemption and of "the Canticle of Humanity." They think that there is no need of a Divine messenger to publish the beautiful truths about God's being all love and forgiveness,— these things a good man could reveal and, by means of them, lead mankind back to God.

Christian People! So long as this world of ours shall last, there will still ring out through the world the accusing charge that man is guilty in the sight of God. Every heathen religion, every pagan poet and sage, spoke of this guilt and of the need of its atonement. All around us, as we look, we see the power of death. The stars of heaven that grow dim, the insect that dies, every leaf that fades and withers, tell us of decay and death. They prove that once upon a time, somehow, somewhere,

this universe was cut off from the source of life and became a kind of world that it was not meant to be.

And could a mere man, then, himself subject to sin and death, himself a member of this creation wherein every creature groans for deliverance and redemption,— could a mere man, in any way, remove the monstrous guilt and bestow pardon and Grace? No more than he could swing the earth out of its orbit with his hand. No one less than the Creator could assume and cancel the guilt of the whole creation.

A religion that professes to have no need of a divine helper and savior may appeal to the haughty and over-cultured people of the day; but it will have no message for those who starve and suffer and weep and mourn and despair. Such as these need a savior who will take away their sins, promise them a better life and lift them up into Paradise, as the Good Thief was lifted up. What they want is,— in one word,— the Grace of God.

But this comes only to those who are willing to believe in Him Who has merited this Grace for us, — Our Savior, Jesus Christ.

And so, Saint John, in his First Epistle, writes: "We know that the Son of God is come; and He hath given us understanding that we may know the

true God, and may be in His true Son. This is the true God and life eternal." (V, 20.)

Therefore, Dear Brethren, let us believe in Grace; let us seek for it, pray for it, hope for it. And let us never forget that, as Saint John tells us, the final blessing and the completion of Grace, is life eternal.

II

In our first discourse, we saw that Grace is a necessary condition of the existence and of the permanence of Christianity,— in short, that it is Christianity's very soul. Hence, Grace gives as clear an evidence of God's activity in the spiritual world as nature gives of His activity in the visible world. Just as from the endless phenomena of the visible creation we infer the existence of a supernatural, all-powerful Creator, so from the manifestations of Grace in the religious and moral order, we get proof of the activity of a supernatural, divine power. And now, before passing on to the consideration of what must be done in order to share in this divine power, we are going to look at an objection that may, perhaps, be raised by unbelievers.

They may say to us: "How can you Christians boast that Grace has morally transformed and uplifted mankind? Whithersoever we turn our eyes in the present Christian world, we discover, on the whole, just about the same amount of passion, sin and crime as obtains among the heathen. The Ten Commandments are broken in all sorts of ways;

and nearly every sin that flourished in the ancient pagan world is in large evidence to-day. Moreover, if Christian Grace possesses this supernatural, world-transforming power, how is it that there still exist other religions competing with Christianity? And how is it that Christianity, itself, contains so many sects mutually hostile to one another? Can these undeniable facts be reconciled with the power and efficacy of Grace?"

Beloved Brethren! God has made free-will a part of the very essence of human nature. It is the highest of all human powers,— a power which ranks next after the divine omnipotence here upon earth, — a power which is often deferred to, even by God, Himself. By means of his free-will, man can take his choice between good and evil, Heaven and Hell, God and Satan. No one, not even the Almighty, Himself, will deprive man of this awful power.

Nor can we deny man's possession of this power, without straightway opening the door to despair. If man is without the power to choose between good and evil, then are all his acts morally valueless. He deserves neither reward nor punishment, neither honor nor contempt; for, if he lacks free-will, he is simply doing, by the very necessity of his nature, what he cannot help doing. In that case, vice and virtue, sin and sanctity, would be of ex-

actly the same value,— and of very little value, at that. Every high-minded man would be driven to despair. Human beings would be nothing more than beasts.

Man is free; he must be free. Once that we have grasped this truth, we see plainly that not even Grace can compel a man to avoid evil and to seek good. If Grace could thus compel a man, it would destroy his very nature.

So we find Our Savior weeping over Jerusalem: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent to thee, how often would I have gathered thy children as the bird doth her brood under her wings, and thou wouldest not." (St. Luke xiii, 34.)

And the Apostle Paul repeats the words of the Psalmist: "To-day, if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts." (Hebr. iii, 7 and 8.)

And the venerable Simeon foretold of the Redeemer: "Behold this child is set for the fall, and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted." (St. Luke ii, 34.)

This prophecy, frequently and literally fulfilled in every century down to the present day, can have but one meaning, namely, that man is free, and that according to his own choice, man can side with

Christ or against Him; he can accept or reject Christ's teaching and Grace.

It is a wonderful privilege, this freedom of the will, for it is a participation in the Almighty power of God. This is the reason that God is said to have made man in His own image and likeness. God's omnipotent Will created heaven and earth; and the human will is able to create either a Heaven or a Hell.

Now, willing implies believing. Because Columbus believed in the existence of an unknown hemisphere, he made up his mind to discover it; and discover it he did, despite every obstacle.

The saints believed in the value of Heaven. They made up their minds to gain it; and they gained it.

As the will plays the chief part in the life of the individual, so it does also in the life of the world. How powerfully has the course of history been affected by strong-willed men!

To will what God wills, is to attain bliss even here upon earth. But to will what sinful nature desires, is to be miserable. It may be said, that even here upon earth a man's will puts him in Heaven or in Hell.

From the power and the freedom of the human will, then, it is plain that man is at liberty not only to reject every false religion but even, if he so

wishes, to reject the true religion, Christianity. God, indeed, takes the first step in the life of Grace. But after God has begun to move, man must begin to follow. God calls by His Grace; and man must heed the call. Grace invites; free-will responds.

To-day, just as in other ages, men can reject the Grace of God. They can refuse the proffered help; they can do evil instead of good, just as freely now as they could in pre-Christian times. Indeed, the Christian can fall even lower than the non-Christian, if he despises Grace and gives free rein to his passions. An old proverb says,—

"The best, when spoiled, becomes the worst."

As a matter of fact, the passions might rage even more furiously in a Christian than in another man, because in the Christian law they are not allowed the license of heathen codes or of the religion of Mohammed.

Now, let us consider the question, Why do the religions which antedated the coming of Christianity still continue to exist? And how is it that to-day they have even more adherents, despite the supernatural power of Grace?

The answer is simply this, Christianity represents the reunion of God and man. It is a grace, a gratuity, something to which no man has a claim. The first man threw away Grace and with it life

everlasting. Through the God-man, this has been restored, but only as a gratuitous gift. Now, whereas it is a cause of just complaint, if one be deprived of a right, one may not complain at being left without a gift,— and Grace is surely a gift.

By his own agreement, God is bound to give man help sufficient for the attainment of his eternal destiny; and every man really gets this sufficient help. Christ's mediatorship is extended to every man of good-will who serves God according to his best knowledge. Christ died for all men without exception and without limitation of place or time. Hence Saint John speaks of "The Lamb Which was slain from the beginning of the world." (Apoc. xiii, 8.)

Moreover, as the Word of God, Christ has revealed Himself in the reason and the conscience of every man. He is "the true Light, Which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world." (John i, 9.) This enlightening includes at least the natural moral law given to every individual. The law of Christ abates not one jot or tittle of this natural law, but perfects it. Saint Augustine teaches that the Grace of Christ has been active in the world ever since the Fall, although not called the Grace of Christ until after the Incarnation.

As to the reason why God bestowed the gift of Christian faith on some nations and withheld it

from others, we know nothing,— just as we know nothing of the motives which led Him to give more Grace to those persons whom He made saints than to those whom He did not make saints.

The existence of a great number of varying Christian sects goes with the human will's gift of liberty. The will can reject any one of the Christian dogmas and is always as free to choose between truth and error as between good and evil. Hence, in every epoch of Christian history, creeds have been constructed that differed from the creed of the Church; and, even down to the present day, Christian truth has been made the subject of innumerable private judgments.

Beloved Brethren! One who wishes to learn something about Gracè, one who is trying to demonstrate its presence in the world, must not act as the enemies of Christianity act. They examine the places where it is not at work; or where it is not understood; or where it is neglected. They should look at the good ground whereon Grace has fallen and where it is producing fruits a hundred fold, thus proving its existence and its divine character.

Consider what we are in consequence of Original Sin. We are prone to evil, selfishness, sloth, pride, avarice, deceit, cruelty. Even if we wage

constant war against these faults and tendencies, we succeed only in getting them under more or less perfect control. To do more than this, we can hardly hope; and to attain to even this, we need all the helps that come from years of experience, from well developed sense of duty, from the possession of personal dignity, or reputation, or social standing.

Thus we balance,— if we are fortunate enough to balance,— between good and evil; and we need all our strength to check the evil and keep it from prevailing over the good. More than this man cannot do, without the help of Grace; and in pagan antiquity no greater height was attained by the very best and noblest souls. Nor has any higher level been reached by the so-called "righteous" men of our own day, who wish to hear nothing of Christian Grace and feel they are at liberty to call themselves "righteous," so long as they keep free of the grosser sins.

But when Grace takes hold of a man, what happens to him? What happens, when God and man, Grace and free-will work harmoniously together? Let me refer to Saint Paul as an example of what occurs in these circumstances. He had been the most furious enemy and persecutor of the infant Church; yet Grace made him an Apostle, and in fact the most enthusiastic of all the Apostles.

Grace inspired him to write these burning words: "Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? or distress? or famine? or nakedness? or danger? or persecution? or the sword? . . . I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord." (Rom. viii, 35–39.)

Paul was not the only one that the Grace of Christ changed. Each of the Apostles was moved by Grace to abandon all things and to follow the poor, unknown Jesus of Nazareth even to a martyr's death.

Moreover, it has taken hold of millions of noble souls of every rank and condition and race,— without limitation of age or sex. And these souls have astounded the pagan world by loving the things that men ordinarily hate,— pain, grief, affliction,— and by despising the things that men ordinarily seek after,— sensual gratification, honor, gold, dignity, position. Souls such as these never murmur and never complain; they show that they can be happy amid the most grievous torments. And never since Christ came upon earth, has this type of soul died out; at no time has the Christian Church lacked saints formed upon this same model; at no

time has Christianity been left without numerous children who, for the love of God, renounced sin, who struggled, suffered patiently, endured all things,— and constantly exemplified a degree of virtue which paganism was unable to achieve or even to imagine.

And, to consider our own day, is it not truly wonderful that Christianity still possesses so many faithful followers at a period when the cultured world has almost entirely turned away from the Christian faith, and when the example of the upper classes has become an influence destructive of religion in hundreds of thousands of souls; that there are so many noble spirits wholly unaffected by doubt, because divine truth has been planted deep in them, not by reason or wisdom, but by the power of Grace?

Beloved Brethren! You know that there are many men who eat their daily bread without ever inquiring how this bread can be taken up by the blood of the body to be converted ultimately into energy. For them it is enough to know that their bodies are strong. In the same way, there are many who, during long years, suffer aches and pains without ever asking just what pain is and just what causes it to affect the body. They feel it and that more than suffices. And so too, there are numberless persons who, each day, believe and pray

and trust, without ever investigating the sources of the faith which has taught them how to suffer with patience and with hope. They simply feel its truth and hence they are unmoved by doubt. They know just this, that Grace is alive and is at work within them. Thus the words of Our Lord are fulfilled, "If any man will do the will of Him, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." (John vii, 17.)

Grace then, is not the fruit of thought and study and investigation. It cannot be discovered by means of scientific experiments. It is one of those things which, as Our Savior said, are "hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed to little ones," that is to say, hidden from the proud and revealed to the humble. (Luke, x, 21.)

Grace is not the offspring of earthly wisdom, for with earthly wisdom it has nothing in common. It is the one help that man needs for the attaining of his true goal. Compared with this goal, all else is utterly valueless; and the nature of this goal is sufficiently indicated by Christ's answer to the question, "What must I do to possess eternal life?" (Luke x, 25.)

It is unreasonable and even silly, if a man who has had no personal experience of Grace, ridicules it, or denies its existence. This is as if a man born blind should attempt to deny the existence of color.

But how is it that some people have no appreciation of Grace? And why do they lack all sense of eternal values? And why do they despise religion and everything connected with it?

The answer is, Because they despise and disregard the means of Grace.

They believe in the natural life only; and they have no faith in that supernatural life of which Grace is the animating principle. They are ready to say in the words of Ecclesiastes: that "there is no good for a man under the sun, but to eat, and drink, and be merry, and that he should take nothing else with him of his labor in the days of his life, which God hath given him under the sun." (Eccles. viii, 15.)

Then again, there is another class of men, namely, those who fill their days with honest toil, who devote themselves to art or science, and who think that thus they are fulfilling their destiny, although they know nothing and care nothing about Grace. They are ignorant that man has a supernatural destiny. They think that this brief earthly existence is man's only life; whereas, a life limited to the earth and its creatures is no true life at all.

The attitude of such persons as these implies opposition not only to Christianity but to all religions, and to the whole experience of the human race

which down through the ages has maintained a consistent belief in immortality.

To the one true goal of man, only Grace can lead us. And we cannot afford to be led astray with regard to Grace by people who know nothing at all about the matter.

III

What is Grace?

As we have already seen, Grace is an inner, supernatural power bestowed on the soul by God.

How may we attain this power?

The best way of all is by means of the Sacraments. The Sacraments are, in fact, the visible and efficacious signs of Grace. Or they may be described as symbolical rites, instituted by God to signify and to effect the justification and sanctification of the soul.

They are then both signs and causes of Grace.

Saint Paul says, "The invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made." (Rom. i, 20.) But "the things that are made" are not capable of giving us a share in the perfections of the Creator; they are mere signs. The Sacraments, however, are more than signs and types of supernatural Grace; they effect, and they impart, to the soul, a share of divine power. Whence have they this extraordinary efficacy? As we have already said, the source of all Grace is Jesus Christ and "there is no other name under

heaven given to men whereby we must be saved." (Acts, iv, 12.) And, as there is no Grace except His, neither are there any other Sacraments than those He instituted. Hence the Church teaches that it is of the very essence of a Sacrament to have been instituted by Christ.

The God-Man, who unites the invisible Godhead with visible human nature, is, so to say, the Sacrament of Sacraments. The outer, visible sign and the inner, invisible Grace, together with the institution by Jesus Christ, are the essential marks of every Sacrament. In the Incarnation, the human body of Jesus is the visible sign; and within it "dwells the fullness of the Godhead," and therefore, the plenitude of Grace. (Col. ii, 9.) And from the God-Man to us, through the sacramental channels by Him instituted, there flows the stream of Grace and salvation. What an admirable harmony we perceive in this process of Redemption!

The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity became man in order to counteract the effects of the first man's sin, that is to free us from misery and death and to restore us to the state of Grace which Adam had lost. By bodily descent from the first Adam, we inherit original sin, moral disorder, proneness to evil,—in a word, the lack of Grace. From Christ, the second Adam, we receive by

means of the Sacraments, pardon, sanctification and the power to do good, in a word, Grace.

When unbelievers tell us it is hard to see why God should bestow spiritual gifts in the Sacraments, by means of visible, tangible signs, we have our answer ready. We reply by simply asking how the tendency to evil gets into the soul of every man, be he believer or unbeliever. The tendency to evil, the aversion from good, ever present in each one of us, is surely a moral and spiritual phenomenon. But how do these predispositions ever get into us, unless by means of the cords of flesh and blood that bind us to our first father Adam? And surely, these are material mediums.

Further, we may ask, Through what medium does Redemption come? "The Grace of God our Savior hath appeared to all men," as the Apostle says. (Tit. ii, 11.) But where and how? Surely in the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God.

When man was in the bondage of sin and almost wholly lost to the appreciation of anything supra-sensible, God could hardly approach him, except by the way of the senses. Therefore God became man, revealed Himself in the flesh, and thus made His appeal first to our senses and then to our souls. Through no other medium could man have been so well reached.

God came to man then, by the way of the

senses; but it was for the purpose of showing man a yet more excellent way. The way of Redemption lies through flesh to spirit and through the visible to the invisible. Thus Christ is truly the go-between and the mediator of God and man, of this world and the next, of earth and heaven, of flesh and spirit, of knowledge and faith, of things visible and things invisible.

Now we can see why God used visible material means in His Sacraments which were destined to be the channels of Grace to each individual soul. It was Our Lord's wonderful and divine way of taking into consideration our bodily and spiritual constitution. By nature we are dependent on the senses for all our knowing, feeling, and willing. Therefore Our Lord made the receiving of His Grace depend upon sensible means, namely, the Sacraments.

Moreover, if we are going to believe in a thing very enthusiastically, we need to see it with our eyes. We are all like the Apostle Thomas who demanded to see the Risen Lord and to touch Him before believing in the Resurrection. Just as the Holy Ghost came down upon the Apostles in the form of tongues of fire, so when Grace is bestowed on us, we receive the Sacraments as so many visible tokens and pledges.

Again, by means of these signs we are differen-

tiated as Christians; we are grouped together, like so many brothers and sisters, in the company of our divine mediator, Jesus Christ.

Beloved Brethren! Throughout the whole religion of Christ, we may see the method of presenting invisible Graces under visible appearances. As we have said, the God-Man manifested His divinity in visible form. Before He left this earth, He established a visible Church and commissioned it to preserve, publish, and distribute His doctrines and His Graces by means of the audible words and the visible signs of the Sacraments. Therefore it is, that in the Catholic religion the senses play so important a part, a part wonderfully well adapted to human needs and very attractive to the souls of the faithful.

Men may, indeed, cast all this up as a reproach to the Church, but before so doing they will have to forget that the central fact of the whole Christian religion, the Incarnation, is in reality, the uniting of visible human nature with the invisible divine Essence. If the Church in her services assigns an important rôle to material things, she is in this but copying the fundamental plan of Christianity, as revealed in the Incarnation, where the temporal and visible are combined with the invisible and eternal. Note well what has happened in those sects which rejected the visible Church and, so far as possible,

eliminated from their services all signs and ceremonies. Their faith in the Incarnation has become steadily weaker and, in many cases, has totally disappeared. Hence, we may infer that the use of visible forms in the Holy Sacraments is dictated by divine wisdom.

Now, let us look a little more closely at the working of the Sacraments and at the strength which they impart to us.

We have already learned that everything under heaven may be reduced to terms of energy. God Himself, is the original energy and everything else that exists is simply the offspring of His parent power.

Wherever we look we see forms of energy at work,— even in the processes of death and decay. Growth and corruption are merely different effects of energy. Generation and development may ultimately be reduced to the same elemental processes as death and disintegration.

It is energy which, through attraction and repulsion, sets in motion the worlds that are coursing along in space. It is energy that keeps us alive, enables us to move, and helps in the drawing of every breath.

God has made us for a twofold life, one of time

and one of eternity; and for the living of them both He gives us energy.

The two most important questions for every man are these:

1. What must I do that I may preserve my present life, and develop my powers?

2. What must I do in order that, after death, I may obtain eternal life?

In these two matters, as indeed, always and everywhere, we all require energy. To live our earthly life fully, we have need of energy; and upon energy depends our whole mental and bodily activity. To breathe, to speak, to walk, to stand, to think, to work, to rest,— it is all a question of energy, and the very first instant that our quick-beating heart ceases to produce energy, we die. And throughout all the various manifestations of energy with which we are acquainted in our present existence, we see the reign of the same wonderful law, namely, that energy resides in organs, in machines. God, alone, possesses energy in Himself and of Himself; so far as men are concerned, energy is always conveyed through the medium of an instrument, a tool. See how plainly our life depends upon our organs,— how we need feet to walk, lungs to breathe, tongues to speak, nerves to feel. And

the energy of these organs must be kept up by means of food and drink.

And now to consider our dealings with the world around us. Again we have need of energy; and again it must come to us through the medium of tools and instruments. We cannot lift a stone without using hand or foot; and, if the stone is heavy, we need machinery. We cannot construct a box, nor build a house, nor make a garment, without tools. So too, with regard to our mental activity, our culture and knowledge. These depend not only upon the different organs of the body, but also upon numberless external mediums, from the slate and pencil of the schoolboy to the telescope, the crucible, the retort, the scales and measures of the scientific investigator.

We must then, Beloved Brethren, recognize, that all we do or attempt, in our earthly life, depends upon energy; and that energy is conveyed to us through the medium of instruments existing outside ourselves.

Likewise, we must recognize that the Sacraments are, in a certain sense, mediums for the transmission of energy; and that, as in the physical world everything depends upon instruments, so in the spiritual world everything will depend upon the Sacraments.

It is the same with regard to spiritual things

as it is with regard to our bodily life, our mental activity, our art, our handicraft, our science and our culture. If this be true, how could any one ever suppose that religion would be left without Sacraments, that it would not be well supplied with machines for the production of that energy which it needs?

Now we come to the second and more important question, What must we do in order to obtain eternal life?

In the beginning, before the Fall, God endowed man with everlasting life and,— as the Scripture tells us,— planted in the midst of Paradise the tree of life, the fruit of which should be for man the food of immortality. This tree then, was to be, as it were, the Sacrament of Paradise, the means of eternal life. But Adam disobeyed God and, as a result of his disobedience, we, in his person, were deprived of the gift of bodily immortality. Holy Scripture says, "Lest Adam therefore, should put forth his hand, and take of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever, the Lord God cast him out of the Paradise of Pleasure and placed before it Cherubims to keep the way to the tree of life. (Gen. iii, 22–24.)

When the fulness of time, the hour of Redemption, was come, God again set up a Tree of Life,

namely, Jesus Christ, of whom the Apostle says, "In Him was Life." (John, i, 4.) And like so many branches, from this Tree spring forth the Sacraments, each full of divine life and energy, so that from them we may receive everlasting life. Thus are fulfilled those mysterious words spoken by the Spirit to Saint John, "To him that overcometh, I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of my God." (Apoc. ii, 7.)

And this promised life, this hope of poor humanity in every place and at every time, this heart's desire, this antidote to despair in darkest hours, this eternal life, God will enable us to obtain by means of the Grace which He bestows on us through the Sacraments.

Just as He gives us energy and preserves our physical life by the means Nature provides in the shape of plants and animals, so He imparts supernatural energy by means of the Sacraments.

We have seen that physical life, whether inner or outer, is possible only with the help of instruments and organs which supply us with energy. In the same way, to live that supernatural life to which we are called, we have need of supernatural machinery.

So, if unbelievers mockingly ask, "Why do you go to Church and why do you receive the Sacraments?" we may quietly answer:

"We are doing exactly what you yourselves do, when you take care of your physical life and health. You understand your need of bodily organs, of food, of schools and of workshops, in your daily activities, in your business, in your science. You know that you cannot get along without the help of these material things, without the aid of what one may call the 'natural sacraments.' We, who believe in everlasting life, are doing precisely the same. To foster and develop this life, we need assistance; we need machines which will supply us with energy; and we find this help in the supernatural Sacraments of our religion. You, who mock us, have then, no right whatever to do so. If even your godless science has need of a sort of sacramental system, surely religion has a right to possess one, too. If it is necessary and reasonable that you should use all possible means for the preserving and beautifying of your earthly life which, sooner or later, will end, with how much more reason may we be solicitous for the things that concern eternal life. We drink not only of the water that flows out of earthly fountains, but also of that water which as Our Savior says, 'shall become a fountain springing up into life everlasting.' (John, iv, 14.) And we eat not only of the bread which nourishes the life of the body, but also of that bread which is a pledge of eternity."

Beloved Brethren! Nowadays, men do not like to believe in the Fall and in the need of redeeming Grace. Proud of the so-called progress of the day, they declare, "We have not fallen, but arisen. From a race of animals we have evolved into our present form and we are going to develop still further."

But unfortunately, men have never yet attained a height of development where they find themselves happier than they used to be. We have not yet learned how to vanquish that ancient enemy of mankind, death, which poisons every human joy. Wherever we look and wherever we go upon earth, everywhere we find lamentation, misery, tears and groans,— now as always. Worst of all, we see men daily dying in pain and anguish. We see them entering into an unknown world. Should this not make us thoughtful? Should it not persuade us to believe in the existence of guilt somewhere? Should it not force upon us the admission that man has sinned and that he is now in need of Grace and Redemption?

It is not the Holy Scripture alone, that bears witness to these truths. Schopenhauer, that unbelieving philosopher, said, Death is a proof that our life involves some transgression. And he said also, This life of ours resembles nothing so much as the atonement of a sin.

Should we then, not look about us for some way of blotting out our guilt and robbing death of its sting? Always, through our life, we are needing and seeking assistance from without; and shall we seek none at that most awful of all hours, the moment of death?

Helps that avail us at death are the best of all helps. And here is the great difference between Nature's assistance and the assistance which comes from the Sacraments, namely, Grace. Both contain energy hidden under visible forms. But the aids given by Nature are of avail only during this brief passing life; whereas the Grace of the Sacraments helps us in a life which will last forever, because it consists of union with the God Whose life stretches from eternity unto eternity.

IV

"Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John iii, 5.) Thus spoke our Divine Savior to Nicodemus.

That these words of our Lord refer to the Holy Sacrament of Baptism cannot be denied. This is then, the one door to eternal life, the first and most necessary of all Sacraments; and it is an indispensable condition without which no other Sacrament is efficacious.

Therefore, in clear and unmistakable words the God-Man commissioned His Apostles above all things to teach and to baptize. The same Spirit of God that brooded over the waters at the creation of the world effects the regeneration of fallen man through the water of Baptism. As the earth arose "out of water" (II Peter iii, 5) by the word of God, so the kingdom of Grace and reconciliation arose from water and the word of God, and so does it endure even to this day.

Unbelievers will perhaps object as follows: "That in the creation of the world water had an

important part, we grant; for water is, as it were, Nature's blood, and is of vital necessity to every organic being. But we cannot understand what water has to do with man's purification and sanctification, since here, the alleged cause and effect bear no relation to each other. What connection is there between the pouring of a little water on the head of a man with the invocation of the Blessed Trinity, and the effecting of supernatural Grace?"

I begin my reply with a question: "Is there then, an obvious relation between cause and effect, in everything else besides the holy Sacraments? I hear a bell ring; and every child can tell me that the ringing is caused by a man who sets the bell in motion with a rope, or strap. How does this happen? Through the power of the man's arm moving the rope. Of course; but where does the arm acquire this power? Is it not from man's will, from his spirit? So then, the ringing proceeds ultimately from the soul. And now let me ask, What natural connection is there between the soul and the ringing of a bell? Apparently none,— certainly no more than between the baptismal water and supernatural Grace."

What relation is there between a beautiful, fragrant flower and the ugly black seed from which it sprang? The wonderful, incomprehensible pro-

cess of development is effected by the Almighty Spirit of God. And He can sanctify a man, and can make him a child of God, through the instrumentality of a little water, just as easily as He makes lovely flowers out of insignificant seeds.

In the early days of Christianity, the ancient heathen ridiculed baptismal water just as the modern heathen do now. But men who had been baptized with water and the Holy Ghost in the beginning of the Christian Era, showed, by their readiness to face martyrdom, that the power of that water was no empty illusion. It enabled them to despise the pagan world and to defy the powerful Roman Empire which attacked their faith. The barbarian fury of the nations that destroyed the Roman Empire was broken upon the baptismal font of the Christian Church.

And in these days of modern paganism, no scorn or ridicule, no progress of art or science, no one of all the thousand fair things of earth that fascinate men, can make the baptized soul waver in its belief in virtue and immortality.

Again, with regard to the subject of baptismal water, let me ask, What does not the genius of man accomplish by means of water? He converts it into steam and uses its energy to produce light and motion. Our railroads, our steamships, our electrical inventions give abundant proof of this.

What then, may not God accomplish, when His Almighty Power chooses water as an instrument to work miracles in the life of man, to render souls holy and virtuous, to influence them to renounce the world, the flesh and the devil, and with patience and resignation to follow the footsteps of their Master?

The water of Baptism has made the world Christian. At the baptismal font, the pagan peoples renounced idolatry and its abominations, just as the heathen neophytes do to-day.

True, many baptized souls have fallen away to serve the world and its lusts. This, however, is not the fault of the Grace of Baptism, but the result of its abuse. The best of remedies is of no avail, if the sick person will not use it. Indeed, it is precisely because the Grace of Baptism, received through water and the Holy Ghost, is so little valued, that religious indifference has become prevalent both in families and in individuals.

Baptism is often regarded as a mere ceremony, customary indeed, and its omission regrettable, but nothing more. On this account children are not trained to develop baptismal Grace and by its help to attain eternal life. They are educated solely for a worldly career. The pleasures of this world, however, and earthly life itself, will end in the grave. Whereas He Who said, "Heaven and

earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Mark xiii, 31), joined to Baptism in water and the Holy Ghost the promise of eternal life. And this promise shall still endure, when the world will have crumbled to dust.

Christ is God. This is shown by His life, by His teaching, and by the history of Christianity for the last twenty centuries. His words, therefore, cannot be doubted or explained away. Even if such an attempt were made, unbelief and scorn would avail naught against the permanence of Baptism and in the face of its effects.

He who has received the Grace of Baptism, and has kept free from sin, will not, however, be able to avoid all conflict with sin when he begins to live in the world and with the world.

The world fell with the sin of the first man. Like him, it lies under the mysterious power of God's enemy. The very elements therefore, as it were, hate man and his work; all creation shows us the great struggle between good and evil.

Day after day, light contends with darkness, sunshine with rain, life with death, virtue with vice.

What a display the world gives of the power of God's enemy — whom Our Savior calls the prince

of this world! How he tempts and deceives men with the vain show of transient pleasure in order to entice them away from what is everlasting!

How his minions lie in order to make believe it is not the power of God, but merely the power of Nature, that operates in the world!

How he tries to make us think that death ends everything, that there is no other, better life, no God, and no eternal reward or punishment!

To break through this tissue of lies, and find a firm support against the spirit of the times, we need to recall the promise of Our Savior: "If you continue in My word, you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John viii, 31–32.)

Again and again, we must repeat our baptismal vows, which set forth the entire duty of man. Our duty is really contained in two words: Allegiance and Renunciation — Allegiance to God; and Renunciation of His enemy, the father of lies.

In the early days of the Church, it was the custom for the neophyte, while pronouncing the baptismal vows, to turn toward the west,— the home of darkness,— and say: "I abjure thee"; and then to turn toward the east — the home of daylight, the symbol of God — and, with outstretched arms, cry "I pledge myself to Thee, O Christ."

Never until time ends, will the conflict between good and evil cease, either on the large field of the world, or in the individual soul. Not until then, will the power of the Evil One be overcome.

The man who is unbaptized, like the man who abuses the Grace of Baptism, stands helpless against the attack of the Evil One. The baptized soul, however, is confirmed in Grace by the Sacrament of Confirmation, and thus are fulfilled the words of Saint Paul: "Now He that confirmeth us with you in Christ, and that hath anointed us, is God, Who also hath sealed us, and given the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts." (II Cor. i, 21–22.)

After having been released from the bondage of Satan through the waters of Baptism, a man receives in Confirmation spiritual weapons with which to defend himself, during his pilgrimage, against his internal and external enemies. And in Confirmation, as in Baptism, the Dispenser of Grace is the Spirit of Grace and Strength, the Holy Ghost.

The Apostles,— confirmed with tongues of fire on the first Pentecost,— laid hands upon the baptized, and they too "received the Holy Ghost," as we are told in the Acts of the Apostles. Since that day, the Church has ever been doing the same by means of the successors of the Apostles.

To-day, where are the results of the Grace of Con-

firmation? Just as the Grace of Baptism is despised by many, so too, the Grace of Confirmation. Yet even now, its blessed activity is manifest in millions of souls.

What efforts are made nowadays to destroy faith, hope, and love — those guiding stars of man in this valley of tears!

How many temptations beset mortal man to-day! — when every one is in mad pursuit of money and pleasure, and earthly comfort is proclaimed to be the end of existence! Yet, in millions of souls, the divine virtues of faith, hope, and charity still flourish, and multitudes still persevere in the way of God amid labor, poverty and self-denial. This is due to the strength which Confirmation gives us in our great conflict between good and evil,— a conflict where salvation is at stake, and where Heaven is the victor's reward.

The Grace of Confirmation is like the sun, which, wherever it penetrates, produces light and heat and energy, but cannot exert its life-giving influence where it is shut out.

Man is free in regard to every Grace. He can reject its light and its strength, just as he can shield himself from the rays of the sun.

In stony soil, nothing grows; but on good ground, beautiful flowers and fruits spring up.

If, after having received Confirmation, one goes

out into the world and lives there without prayer, without worshiping God, without endeavoring to behave like a Christian, one's soul becomes a sandy waste and Grace can have no effect upon it. It lies subject to passions and the powers of darkness.

Confirmation equips one with weapons for the struggle against the world, the flesh, and sin; but it does not render one invulnerable. Even the best and most zealous warriors receive wounds in the battle and sometimes they are temporarily overcome by evil. On these occasions, Grace comes to our aid in a third sacrament, namely, Penance. Here too, as in Baptism and Confirmation, the Dispenser of Grace is the Holy Ghost, the Physician Who heals wounds and revives fallen souls.

So Our Savior, when conferring on His Disciples the power to forgive sins, said: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." (John xx, 22–23.)

Our life is a warfare, a constant warfare; every day and every hour, evil is struggling against good, within us and without us, to-day as always. At no time are men free from this conflict, though some are harder pressed than others, and some must fight for a short time and others for a longer period.

In so unceasing a struggle, many, of course, are

wounded and many fall. Indeed, none go unscathed; each one receives some hurt from the power of evil. Like an immense river flowing on from generation to generation, sin runs through the history of man, century after century.

But for all overcome by sin is provided the Grace of the Sacrament of Penance. Through contrition, confession, and satisfaction, comes forgiveness of guilt with restoration of the friendship of God.

The chief element in this Sacrament is contrition. He who repents sincerely and as a Christian should, readily acknowledges his guilt and satisfies for sins against God and his neighbor.

But what do the children of this world know of sincere repentance? To their haughty spirits nothing seems more detestable than the word repentance. According to the principles of our day, man is his own master. So long as he violates no law of the State, he is responsible to no one but himself for his comings in and his goings out.

If remorse, or rather despair, ever does seize upon unbelieving men, they think,— like the heathen of old, who had no God and no hope,— to remedy the situation by self-destruction.

As a rule, however, they are far from feeling remorse for the folly, or weakness, or frailty that they have been guilty of.

As the beginning and essence of repentance is

humility, which bows before God, the Lord of all creation, so the chief obstacle to repentance is Pride.

Long ago the Psalmist said beautifully: "O God to my hearing thou shalt give joy and gladness and the bones that have been humbled shall rejoice.

"Turn away thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

"Create a clean heart in me, O God; and renew a right spirit within my bowels.

"Cast me not away from thy face; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and strengthen me with a perfect spirit." (Ps. l, 10–14.)

Beloved Brethren! How merciful is God to the penitent sinner! He wills not that the sinner, remorseful and despairing, should take his own life. As the Holy Ghost, Himself, has said: "I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." (Ezech. xxiii, 11.)

With the love of a father, He awaits the return of a long-lost son; and "there shall be more joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance." (Luke xv, 7.)

No matter how much or how often the sinner

has offended, God, Who is patient and long-suffering, does not forget His promise. Unfortunately, some men never know God and His Love, because they lack the first of all Graces, that gift which their sponsors implored for them when,— in answer to the first question asked at Baptism, "What do you wish from the Church of God?"— they replied, "Faith."

Repentance, joined to this faith, gives even the greatest sinner peace and salvation for time and for eternity.

A learned, spiritual writer * of our day has said: "To repentance God has given some of His own Omnipotence."

God alone has the right to forgive sins. But He has imparted this power to repentance. What water cannot cleanse, nor fire purify, nor time destroy, repentance will instantly efface. Like wax before the flaming fire, sin melts away before repentance, even though as huge and as old as the everlasting hills. Without the co-operation of repentance, God Himself is powerless to take away the sinner's guilt. But repentance converts the sinner's hatred and enmity into love and grace.

Failure to repent is, however, not the only difficulty. The Sacrament of Penance is misprised and neglected, because it involves the acknowledgment

* P. A. Weiss, O.P.

of one's guilt in the confessional,— although confession is really most wonderfully adapted to the needs of man's nature.

Confession is, so to speak, natural to the human heart, whether moved by joy or sorrow, but more especially in the latter case.

The greater our need and our grief and the deeper our sorrow, the more anxiously do we seek for a soul to whom we can open our hearts. Usually remorse is concerned with things which we are reluctant to reveal, and yet our agony urges us to speak out.

What a help then, is sacramental confession! Here we can reveal our needs to one fitted by God and by his office to listen to us, one who is bound by an inviolable bond of secrecy, one from whom, by divine ordinance, we can obtain the forgiveness even of our most grievous sins.

Does not a father demand a confession of guilt from an erring child? and do not men require it from one who has transgressed the human laws of society? Shall not God then, do likewise?

Since the priest cannot bind or loose unless he knows what the sins are, Christ's words make it plain that God requires the sinner to confess his sins, so that in return he may receive absolution, the visible sign of forgiveness.

None but God Himself could require the con-

fession of sins. Men would never have submitted to a human command, to a priestly invention. That the practice of confession, which was accepted by all classes of Christian society until the time of Luther, was general, is proof in itself of divine institution.

What the heart needs, what all men insist upon from one another, what secular authority demands — the acknowledgment of fault — this God has raised to the dignity of a Sacrament and endowed with the holiness and efficacy of a Sacrament.

Thus, joined to repentance, confession has become an instrument of Grace, which conveys pardon and mercy, happiness and peace, even to the greatest sinner.

Is the world any better because so many Catholics remain away from confession? Does the awful increase in the number of suicides in our time bear witness for, or against, the expediency of manifesting the state of one's soul in the hour of need and of anguish? Has the man ever lived who avoided confession because of his love for virtue? Rather, is it not passion and religious indifference that lead men to reject this means of Grace?

Again, it is pride that especially opposes confession as it opposes repentance; because pride is opposed to self-knowledge. Even the old pagan sages were aware of this. "Know thyself" was

the warning inscription on one of their most famous sanctuaries.

We men know a great deal. We know something about everything, from a blade of grass to the sun. But about ourselves, about our own inner weaknesses and failings, we know very little, because self-love and pride will not allow it.

The best means to obtain a correct knowledge of oneself, of one's moral worth, is the confession of one's faults. On that account, it was in use among the ancient heathen, and is still used by the Buddhists, whose religion is older than Christianity.

Among them confession of sin is regarded as a necessary condition of forgiveness.

Even among the Evangelical Churches, some sort of confession was in general use until well into the eighteenth century.

Dear Brethren! In an age which seeks salvation where it is not, and vainly attempts to make its children happy without faith in a higher life; in an age when many desire to hear no more about poor and sinful humanity; in such an age, we need not wonder, if penance and repentance are neglected and despised.

But time passes on, and with it pass its theories. To every child of this changing order there comes in the swift passing of time the hour of death, the moment of departure from this miserable earth.

Christian brethren, what do you think brings greatest comfort to a man in the hour of death? Is it the thought that he has risked the salvation of his soul in the world, and with the world, which he is now forever parting from? Or is it the sight of the priest who comes to console him in his dying moments with the words of Our Savior: "Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee." (Matt. ix, 2.)

The answer is plain. And so the conclusion is plain, that it is foolish to despise during life such a great means of Grace.

Christian Brethren! Our Lord says: "God so loved the world, as to give His only-begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in Him, may not perish, but may have life everlasting." (John iii, 16.)

God's love is shown not only by the sending of His Son, but also by the way in which He still showers His Graces upon us.

The Incarnation was, indeed, His greatest manifestation of Love, yet this love is also incessantly manifested in the Sacraments which daily impart to us the fruits of that first great love. At our birth, He receives us with the Grace of Baptism. When at a later age we face the dangers of the world, He gives us Confirmation. If we are overcome by temptation, he offers us Grace again in the Sacrament of Penance.

Can God do more to win us for eternal life? Yes, beloved brethren, and He has done more. He imparts to us a much greater sacramental Grace, and accompanies us through each stage of this miserable life to the very portals of death. This will be seen clearly in our next discourse.

V

Grace, as we have learned from Saint Augustine, is the inflowing of divine love. This description is applicable to each of the seven Sacraments, but in a peculiar and perfect sense to the most excellent of them the All-Holy Sacrament of the altar.

The Holy Eucharist does not convey to us merely a sense of the presence of God; it does not give us His love only; but it bestows upon us God Himself, the Author of all Grace and all true Love. Thus, through it, we receive the very fullness of Grace and Love.

The All-Holy Sacrament of the altar is, in truth, a creation apart,— a marvel which manifests the divine omnipotence in the most splendid and wonderful way. It is a memorial of God's miracles; and, as every miracle is incomprehensible, so the miracle of all miracles,— the Holy Eucharist,— is, of course, the mystery of mysteries. We poor mortals, to whom each drop of water and each grain of sand is a mystery, must neither attempt an explanation, nor entertain a doubt. For us it is enough to know that such is the will of God.

Surely this knowledge will suffice to set every doubt at rest; for with God nothing is impossible.

Long ago man desired to be as God. For this reason he sought the forbidden fruit and so fell under the condemnation of the divine wrath. Ever since then fallen man has been seeking to regain happiness and his lost Paradise. The ancient heathen believed that in their sacrificial meals they banqueted with their gods and entered into communion with them. Steeped in miserable idolatry, men were everywhere crying out for some redeemer and helper. Then, in the fulness of time, God sent His Son Who told us of the fruit of a tree which would make man as God: "He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood hath everlasting life and I will raise him up on the last day. . . . He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood abideth in Me and I in him." (John vi, 55–57.)

In the early Christian centuries, this Bread was the strength of martyrs and confessors. On the first day of the week, all Christians assembled together to partake of the divine banquet. At the present day, in the Christian Church, the All-Holy Sacrament of the Altar is the central point of her worship, the great source of supernatural aid to her and to her faithful children.

In every age, this Bread has been the badge of sanctity, the distinctive mark of humanity's only

real heroes, the Christian saints. They are the souls who love everything that sensual men hate, — pain, poverty, disgrace; and who hate everything that worldlings love,— money, honor, pleasure.

As formerly, in Paradise, there stood the tree of life, so now in the midst of this vale of tears, stands the All-Holy Sacrament of the altar, the Bread of Immortality. In an existence ever subject to change and death, man receives from God in the Blessed Eucharist the pledge of life everlasting. To the world, all trembling with the fear of death, the Church repeats again and again the words of Christ, "If any man eat of this Bread he shall live for ever." (John vi, 52.) And she repeats the terrible warning as well, "Amen, amen, I say to you; unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood you shall not have life in you." (John vi, 54.)

Grace is the love of God; and since God is eternal as well as loving, His perfect love-gift is life everlasting. Now we poor mortals dread nothing so much as death, and desire nothing so much as lasting happiness. It might therefore be supposed that man, pursued and terrified by death, would hasten gladly to receive the Bread of everlasting life. But what we actually find is, that many men

do not even wish to hear about it. Others receive it reluctantly once a year and are very much relieved when their annual Communion is over.

How are these puzzling facts to be explained? The difficulty lies in man's failure to believe that this Bread is really what it is declared to be by Jesus Christ and by His Church. To some minds the prodigy seems too great, the fact too incomprehensible to be believed. Yet precisely in this incomprehensibility we may find a proof of its truth.

Could a mere man ever dare to offer bread to other men saying, "Take ye and eat; this is my body; he that eateth of this shall live for ever"? Surely any one who spoke thus would be laughed at as a madman and would be disregarded by all reasonable people. If then, it is impossible that a doctrine such as this could be accepted on the word of a mere man, it must be based upon the word of God. That it was thus taught by God is clear from the event; for not one man alone, not only the twelve Apostles, but millions of men in every succeeding age, accepted this doctrine.

Some one may object: "For thousands of years mankind believed the superstitions of idolatry. For ages men believed that the sun moved around the earth. Yet in these things they were universally deceived."

But we must not forget that the failure to

recognize the truth about God was due to the fact that human reason had been so darkened and men had become so sensual that the existence of a purely spiritual Being was inconceivable. The notions of the ancients who prayed to wood and stone would nowadays be laughed at by the simplest Christian child.

With regard to the belief in the sun's rotation, we must remember that appearances seemed to warrant the erroneous view — there was the daily phenomenon of the rising and setting sun. But in the Mystery of the Altar, things are all the other way. The senses are unanimous in declaring against the presence of the God-Man in the visible appearance of bread.

Despite all, men have believed in this Mystery of mysteries because, with Saint Peter, they believe that He who gives us this Bread is the Christ the Son of the living God, Who has the words of eternal life and Who possesses full power to change bread into His Body.

From the beginning, the great desire of the human heart was always, to be like God, to be united to God, and to live forever. And this was not only the desire of the human heart; it was the wish of God as well. God's dealings with the soul all tend to this end, to unite it to Himself, the source of

Grace, and eventually to let it behold the glory which the Son had with the Father before the world was. And the greatest of God's acts in furtherance of this end is the bestowing upon the soul of Holy Communion. God, Himself, could stoop no lower than this,— to become our food, our daily bread, in order to enter into the most intimate communion with us.

How does man respond to this love, this self-humiliation, this offer of the pledge of eternal beatitude?

For earthly happiness, which is a dream, and, even in the case of the most fortunate, only a matter of days and hours, men do all they can,— thinking, laboring, striving, searching, hastening now here, now there. And for the only true happiness which is eternal, countless men are not willing even once to receive Holy Communion.

One who, with open eyes and believing heart, considers the disrespect which meets this most wonderful means of Grace, this greatest proof of love, will surely recall the words of Simeon when he took the child Jesus in his arms and said: "This child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many." (Luke ii, 34.)

It was not enough to give us in the Blessed Sacrament the pledge of eternal life. Day after day, in Holy Mass, the Lord re-enacts before our eyes,

in an unbloody manner, the sacrifice of Calvary, which is the source of all Grace. He wishes thus to conduct us daily to that fount of Grace, His atoning death, and to teach us — as the Church says,— how to apply its saving efficacy to the remission of our daily sins. In our behalf, on the altar, He adores the Father, He offers thanks, He propitiates, He impetrates benefits. Thus a rich stream of Grace and blessing flows to us daily from the Holy Eucharist considered as a Sacrifice. New graces still, are to be obtained in Holy Communion.

Daily the bells of town and village ring out the morning summons to Holy Mass. But how few heed the call of the bells! The majority of men have no time to spare for this; they need every moment for the world and for their ordinary affairs of business. For God, for eternity, for the life of Grace, they have not even a half-hour. Everything else comes first. Not only necessary work, but amusements and pastimes and idling, all have a prior claim.

"Ingratitude is the world's payment," says a well-known proverb. And of this ingratitude, God's love has most to tell. God who has bestowed the benefits most precious and most enduring, receives the least thanks of all.

Again and again, day after day, God offers us Grace and eternal life. At the baptismal font, in

Confirmation, in Confession, at the altar-rail, on the altar, His omnipotent power is at work, His love is, as it were, taxed, in order to win us,— not for His own sake, but for the sake of our eternal happiness. But it is in vain. Indifference, ingratitude, perhaps, disdain and scorn, are the answers received from many men.

For the world, everything is sacrificed. In return the world gives trouble and unrest, if not misery and poverty. And for that peace which the world cannot give, that peace which can be obtained only through the Grace of God, men will sacrifice nothing, absolutely nothing. Indeed, only divine love and divine patience could equal the thanklessness and the indifference of men.

But, whether or not man has used the Grace bestowed upon him; whether or not has attained to justification; whether he has conducted himself as a disciple of Christ, or as a child of Adam; whether he has heeded, or disregarded, the call of Grace; whether he has shown himself grateful or thankless,— in any event, he must come one day to the gate through which all men pass, willingly or unwillingly, the gate that leads through death to the judgment-seat of God.

At that decisive moment, when man is forever bidding farewell to the world and its pleasures, and

is going forth to be judged in the company of all his works, the Grace of God comes once again, despite all that has happened, and seeks to comfort the dying man in his agony, to lend him courage and strength for his final struggle, and for the last time to wash away his sins. This is effected through the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, while these words are being spoken, "Through this holy anointing and His most loving mercy, may the Lord pardon thee whatsoever sins thou hast committed by thy seeing; by thy hearing; by thy smelling; by thy tasting and thy speaking; by thy touching; by thy walking."

The Sacrament of Extreme Unction bears a certain relation both to Confirmation and to Penance. In Confirmation, the Holy Oil strengthens us to live well, and in Extreme Unction, to die well. As the athletes of old anointed themselves with oil in order to increase their strength, so anointing has become the visible sign of the Sacraments which strengthen us in our struggles during life and in our last great struggle at death.

The inexhaustible mercy of God toward sinful man is well brought out by a consideration of the relation between the two Sacraments of Penance and Extreme Unction. If the dying man is unable to confess his sins, then Extreme Unction takes the place of Penance and restores the contrite soul

to the state of Grace lost by sin. So, before our body is cast off forever, it is anointed with holy oil for the remission of those sins which during life were committed by its means.

Is there any one who does not wish to die bravely? Has not the whole world always admired those who, with courageous hearts, depart out of this life? And must we not recognize a vast difference between the meeting of death in the quick struggle of the battlefield and the patient awaiting of inevitable death that, day by day, creeps nearer to the man who lies on his bed of pain watching its coming?

Hence, the spirit of Grace,— the power from on high, as Our Savior calls it,— comes to the sick man's assistance at the last terrible moment and puts courage into the soul that is now beyond all earthly aid. Fitting enough it seems that Grace which took hold of this man in his cradle, at the moment of his entrance into the world, should come now for the last time to assist him at the moment of his final departure.

Christ transmitted the administration of the means of Grace to His Apostles, the pillars of His Church. Through the ages, the Church continues the Apostolic mission with the aid of the Sacrament of Holy Orders which conveys the necessary Grace

and authority to those Christians who are chosen out from among other men to be "ministers of the word and the dispensers of the mysteries of God." (I Cor. iv, 1.) This Sacrament is bestowed upon the candidate for the priesthood, not to further his personal sanctification, but for the sake of others. The sacramental Grace of Holy Orders is, first of all, a "Grace of office." It does indeed, help to make the recipient more perfect, but only in view of the fact that he has been called to the office of bestowing upon other men the gift of supernatural life, that is of Grace. And since this office is so very great and its performance so very difficult, Grace is given in proportion.

It is a sublime office to bestow heavenly Grace upon poor wretched creatures during their incessant struggle with misery and with death. It is a sublime office to be the dispenser of those divine mysteries which, in the dark hours of pain and grief and in the agony of death, can fill the human heart with trust and courage and strength and peace and hope. It is a sublime office, in the name of the world's Redeemer and the world's Judge, to announce His glad tidings to that same world and, in His name, to promise and to impart the gift of everlasting life to the poor fleeting creatures of this transitory world.

Yet, in our days, how little sought after is this

sublime office! It is only worldly dignities and honors that seem to be worth while. In the eyes of numberless men, the Grace of God is valueless. Just as it is often the poor and lowly who believe most fervently in, and long most for, the means of Grace, so it is again the poor that most often dedicate themselves to the priesthood. And, as Grace is not highly valued by the world to-day, neither are the ministers of grace very greatly respected. Often they are hated and even insulted, because they speak of another life than the present and of other goods than those which are prized by the children of this world.

In the old heathen days, Dear Brethren, the priestly state was honored and loved by the mighty ones of the world and by the best element among the people. The noblest Roman families proudly gave their sons and daughters to the service of the heathen divinities. But, as soon as the Christian priests demanded of the Roman Government the recognition of the liberty, equality and fraternity of all men, at once they became objects of hatred, and many of them suffered the fate of the martyr. A similar, if less terrible, experience is theirs to-day, whenever they dare defy the State and choose to obey God rather than man.

To the unpopularity of the Christian priesthood, the scientific men of the time have always contrib-

uted. At the very beginning, the Jewish Scribes were the prinicipal enemies of Jesus Christ. When Christ's new and unheard-of doctrine entered the heathen world, the sages and scholars of the Empire at once proclaimed it an absurdity which would pervert the people if it were not instantly eradicated. Up to that time, the wise men had been allowed to frame the rules of human conduct; the poets had constructed the heavens and created the gods. Then came Christ, to give into the keeping of poor fishermen of Genesareth the words of eternal life and sublimer truths than the world had ever heard before. At once there ensued a struggle that now, after twenty centuries, is not yet over.

Science claims the right to dominate the world, to set its uncertain conclusions over against the divine truth proclaimed by people and priests usually of humble origin. The priests, by virtue of their mission, oppose the false wisdom of the world; and in consequence are cordially hated. "If the world hate you, know that it hath hated Me before you; if they have persecuted Me, they will persecute you" are the words of Our Lord to His Apostles. (John xv, 18–20.) So the Christian priesthood goes steadily on its way, preaching God's truth and dispensing His Graces, by right of the Master's bidding: "Going therefore, teach ye all nations, baptizing them . . . and behold I am with

you all days even to the consummation of the world." (Matt. xviii, 19–20.)

The human race is perpetuated by the union of the sexes in marriage. That the children born of the union should be consecrated to God and eternal life, the religion of every civilized people has set its seal upon marriage. Christ, in His religion, raised marriage to the dignity of a Sacrament and thus imparted to it an especial holiness, that thereby, bounds might be set for passions which had become shameless, and that the fickle tendencies of the human heart might be properly corrected.

What had woman been before Christ raised marriage to the dignity of a Sacrament? A dishonored slave, without legal rights, and exposed to every kind of shame. Sacramental Grace put woman on an equal footing with man, and made her the queen of the family, the honored and beloved mother and teacher of her children. The Grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony checks the selfishness of man and opposes to his passion the virtue of true love. It upholds the two chief pillars of marriage, its unity and its indissolubility.

The Grace of this Sacrament renders the Christian hearth the center of such love as the pagans never knew. The Grace of this Sacrament makes

the parental home a paradise to which, in his old age, man looks back as the blessed place where he once passed the untroubled days of youth. The Grace of this Sacrament makes of the Christian family a house of God, where parents and children with common love unite in common prayer, in remembrance of God, in labor and suffering and patient resignation to the divine Will.

But why are there so many unhappy marriages, so many ungrateful children, so many abandoned and disconsolate fathers and mothers? Because the Grace attached by God to the Sacrament of Matrimony is ignored and despised. The alliance of hearts is ratified only according to worldly forms. The family is ruled, and the children are brought up, not according to the spirit of God but according to the fashion of the times.

The higher kind of love, the love that comes from God and leads to God, is largely lacking in our families. There is lack also of family prayer, of common attendance at Holy Mass, of united reception of the Sacraments. Hence, of course, there is lack of the Grace of God and the peace of God, of peace between husband and wife, of peace between parent and child. Then, when misfortune comes there is no way of seeking comfort; and this fact occasions many a domestic tragedy.

Beloved Brethren! Here you have the Sacraments briefly described as means of Grace. They accompany man from the cradle to the grave; they sanctify him at every stage of life; and especially they make holy the state of wedlock and the priesthood,— the first, because through it, mankind is constantly renewed in the natural order; the latter, because its office is to conduct the offspring of the family into the way of supernatural grace and lead it to life everlasting.

So there is Grace in the Church, like the sun in the heavens, ready through the Sacraments to pour light and heat and supernatural energy into the soul of every man of good will. If, to-day, the outlook is an ominous one, it certainly is not the fault of Grace.

To Grace we may apply Our Savior's parable about the seed whose growth and productivity depend upon the quality of the soil whereon it falls. That which falls by the wayside, or on stony ground, or among thorns, brings forth little or no fruit; but that which falls upon good ground brings forth fruit a hundred fold,— as may be seen in the lives of the true children of Grace, namely, the saints.

Dear Brethren! If the men of our unpeaceful time would renew in spirit their baptismal vows and renounce pride, sensuality,

mammon-worship and all works opposed to faith in Jesus Christ; if they would arm themselves with the weapons of the Holy Ghost in their warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil; if they would repent of their sins and seek pardon in the Sacrament of Penance; if they would often nourish their faith and humility with the Bread of Life in the All-Holy Sacrament of the altar; if they would use the Grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony for the sanctification of the family and the home,— then there would surely bloom for the world a new and happier age; and, amid all the struggles and afflictions of this present life, man would look forward with calm joy to the future where shines the crowning Grace of all,— Life Everlasting.

VI

To obtain Sacramental Grace, we need the assistance of the priesthood to whom Christ entrusted the administration and distribution of the seven chief means of Grace. But, in His boundless goodness, God has given us still another means of Grace which can be used at any time and place, namely, Prayer.

One might be inclined to suppose that those baptized Christians who despise and neglect the Sacraments are, at least, zealous in the use of a means of Grace so easy to use as prayer, which is always at hand and can be utilized even in the privacy of one's own room. Yet we find many persons who have no desire for the pardon and sanctification conferred by the Sacraments and, at the same time, utter not a single prayer.

Prayer, Beloved Brethren, is the language of religion and, whenever religion is lightly esteemed, prayer is apt to be equally neglected. Nevertheless, he who prays is fulfilling one of the noblest functions of a reasonable being.

The highest act of the human intelligence is to know God,— to look beyond the world and its

visible forms, to find and to glorify the invisible Creator. It is the unique privilege of reason to investigate all things in the universe. Set apart from all the rest of creatures by the gift of reason, man is the one spectator of the drama which we call Nature. Without his presence, Nature becomes a wilderness lacking both use and purpose. Man, by means of his reason, proceeds from the knowledge of the visible creation to the knowledge of the invisible Creator, admires His omnipotence, wisdom and goodness, clasps suppliant hands before this omnipotent, all-wise, and all good Being, and offers prayer for himself and the whole world. This prayer, as we have said, is one of the noblest activities of the human reason.

"Nature," wrote Saint Augustine, "understands nothing. Nature can only present herself to us that in her we may recognize her divine Author. Nature is unable to pray; but she can move us to prayer. And she will not permit us to remain ignorant of the God that she herself is incapable of knowing."

In the same strain the Psalmist sang: "Let all Thy works, O Lord, praise Thee." (Ps. cxliv, 10.) And all His works do praise Him by the mere fact of their existence. Man, alone of all creatures, is able to put his praise into words; that is, he can pray.

Saint Francis of Assisi often cried out: "Ye flowers of the fields and ye little birds of the air, preach not so loudly that I must love God."

At all times and in every form of religion, man has felt it a duty to pray,— not merely to praise God, but also to entreat Him, to appeal to Him in every need, and to thank Him for having been heard.

A well-known proverb says: "Necessity teaches us to pray." If this proverb is true, then surely man has a unique motive for prayer; since he is indeed, the neediest of all creatures by reason of his poverty, his pain and his grief. He alone knows and feels the meaning of that care and anxiety which accompany millions of men throughout their whole lives.

Man alone, is admonished to pray for his neighbor. God did not wish man to be sufficient unto himself, to be capable of doing everything of himself and by himself. Therefore, all of us, whether king or beggar, must satisfy our daily needs in such wise that we shall have constant occasion either to make, or to grant, petitions. Would it not be quite unnatural, to refuse to deal with God as we are accustomed to deal with men whom we are always asking to give us this thing or that? Would it not be very foolish to be solicitous about obtaining the

help of men and to be indifferent about receiving the help of God? The very pagans regarded the failure to pray as a sign of unreasonableness. Not only did they enter upon all public business with sacrifice and prayer, but they used prayer for the sanctification of their domestic and personal life.

"As often as you can," said the Greek poet, Hesiod, "worship God with prayer and sacrifice, that grace and blessing may be thine both at thy going to rest and at the return of day's sacred light."

And the heathen philosopher Xenophanes, wrote: "When thou goest to table, remember that it is the first duty of a just man to praise God, to ask for blessings, and to beg that he may learn to do good."

In the Golden Poem of the disciple of the famous Pythagoras, we read:

"Hast thou in mind to do something? Then, go first to God for assistance in its accomplishing. And let not sleep visit thy tired eyelids, before thou hast well examined the doings of thy day. What have I done wrong? What brought to completion? What omitted? So go through thy day, from early morning on. Hast thou failed? Repent. Hast thou done well? Rejoice. In this wise, shalt thou easily follow the path of godly virtue."

How many Christians of the present day would be shamed by these words from heathen lips!

Nowadays, there are many industrious and intelligent men,— otherwise upright,— who begin and end the day, like the beasts that lie down in the field at night and rise up again at morn without any other concern than to keep alive. They pass year after year without ever addressing a "Thank God" or an "Our Father" to the Author of their being and Judge of their eternal destiny. This is the renouncing of man's highest privilege, namely, to know and to worship God. It is to fall away from God and content oneself with being on the level of the beasts. It is to relinquish the chief human dignity, that of being able to adore God. It is to lose that higher life whose very breath is prayer. In a word, it is to cut the chains that unite the soul to God. So long as a man prays, he is not wholly lost; but, when he ceases to pray, then he severs the last bond between himself and his Maker.

Prayer is the first,— often it is the last,— sign of supernatural life. The destruction of that life begins with neglect of prayer, just as the resuming of prayer is the sign of a spiritual reawakening. This does not mean that we should be devotees; that we should think we can fulfil every obligation by mere lip-worship. The point is that we must not

let ourselves be like the animals, or lower than the animals.

Remember the words of the Lord through the prophet Isaias:

"Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken. I have brought up children and exalted them; but they have despised Me. The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib; but Israel hath not known Me and My people hath not understood." (Is. i, 3.)

But how comes it that there are so many people who do not pray? We can find various explanations.

Sometimes people think there is no God and no higher life; that everything originates from Nature, or by chance. What leads them so to think? It may be their passions which want no God; or it may be a godless "science" which, without any proof, advances its own wild theories. That there is, in truth, a God, is affirmed not only by all the religions of the world, but by our reason, by our conscience, by human history, by the voice of the whole universe, from the worm in the dust to the sun in the heavens — for, without God, the whole world becomes one huge and endless riddle.

Another cause of the neglect of prayer is the

low and sensual existence of many men whose sense of a higher spiritual life diminishes in the same measure that they devote themselves to earthly things and let themselves be contented with acquiring, possessing and enjoying these.

Another cause is pride. To pray means to humble oneself; to go down into the depths of one's heart; to confess one's weakness and misery; and in the acknowledgment of all this, to cry, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner!" Man, in his pride, looks on prayer as a humiliation of which he is ashamed. Thousands of our most cultured people are not averse,— nay, they call it an honor to be allowed,— to bow and scrape and bend the knee meekly before a miserable man. But they would die of shame, if they were to kneel down in a church before God and, with clasped hands, pray to the Lord of heaven and earth.

More thoughtful and more spiritual people sometimes excuse their failure to pray by saying man cannot live by prayer alone. But did any religion ever declare that man can live by prayer alone? What religion does affirm is this,— that "not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God." (Matt. iv, 4.)

We have sadly significant evidence of a man's low spiritual condition, when we find him thinking that he needs to be concerned about nothing but

the nourishment of his bodily life. As a matter of fact, and as every true Christian knows, prayer procures the blessing of God even in temporal affairs. But the main value of prayer lies in its power to lift us up above the miseries of this earthly life and to set us on a much higher plane of existence.

Just here is the pity of it,— that so many men live and strive only for the advancement of their temporal interests, for food, clothes, money, honor, pleasure. In the wide prevalence of this materialism lies the great social danger of the present day; for these habits, like the spirit of religious indifference, will sift down from the cultured classes into the ranks of the poor, overworked, heavy-burdened people, and the consequence will be disastrous.

What is the remedy? Prayer. He who prays is lifted up above the low level of this present life. He hopes and prays for higher things than this world has to offer; in prayer he finds the courage to endure the pains, and the strength to bear the burdens, of existence; and by prayer he succeeds in drawing down to himself divine assistance.

The Lord has pledged His word not to refuse him who prays aright. "If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you." (John xvi, 23.)

Too seldom do we pray in the name of Jesus, that is to say, in the way He prayed and taught us to pray. This is the reason why often we pray much and receive little.

In the practice of prayer we ought to be self-denying, patient, industrious. In a word, we ought to show that we are doing our best to co-operate with the Grace of God.

A good old proverb says: "God helps those who help themselves."

To make pious speeches, to stay a long time in the church at our devotions, to wear a forbidding face, to keep heaving sighs over the sinfulness of our times,— this is not the kind of devout life that God approves of.

He who, in prayer, asks for strength to combat his sins and passions, who begs for patience amid the contradictions of life, who seeks the grace of perseverance in the discharge of his duties,— this man is praying as a Christian and his prayer will be heard.

The famous motto, "Pray and work," applies not only to physical labor and to material affairs. It implies also, that we must both pray and work, if we wish our souls to be healed and perfected.

God does not demand long prayers, nor many prayers. What He wants is the offer of our hearts

and wills. The lips and the voice are of no avail; it is the heart that counts. Our Divine Savior, Himself, uttered the reproach: "This people honoreth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." (Matt. xv, 8.)

There is a prayer without words, a prayer of the heart and mind. This kind of prayer is often of more value than a spoken prayer. The heart gets to God more quickly than the voice.

The penitent Mary Magdalene spoke not a single word when she first approached Christ. She fell at His feet and from the sorrowful depths of her heart flowed out the tears of love,— and she rose up a saint.

The Apostle Paul admonishes us to "pray without ceasing." (I Thess. v, 17.) And Our Saviour Himself says: "Watch ye therefore, praying at all times." (Luke xxi, 36.)

What do these texts mean? Do they mean that we must be reciting prayers incessantly? Surely not; for we have the words of Our Savior: "When you are praying, speak not much, as the heathens. For they think that in their much speaking they may be heard." (Matt. vi, 7.)

The point was well put in the mediæval couplet

> First to the skies
> Will the short prayer rise.

What does it mean to pray?

It means to lift one's mind, one's soul, to God. It means to have God before one's eyes, in all that one does or leaves undone. Prayer of this kind is possible at every moment and in every occupation.

To begin the day's work with prayer; to pray at the close of day; to ask a blessing at each meal-time and to utter a prayer frequently in the intervals; to work justly, honestly, conscientiously, for our daily bread as God's law ordains; and to forget God neither in joy nor in sorrow,— this is to "pray without ceasing"; this is to pray "in spirit and in truth"; this is to pray with the heart during both work and rest. And this is the way in which we may effectively bring down God's blessing on every moment of our lives.

Never to pray at all, is to commit spiritual suicide; it is to sink below the level of the beasts. To pray carelessly is to offer mere worthless lip-service. But to pray in the way above described, is to exercise the noblest function of a man and a Christian, and to create a never-failing source of temporal and eternal blessings.

Christian Soul! Sometimes, perhaps, you will be praying with both voice and heart and nevertheless you will be tempted to say: "God does not hear my prayer. It would be so easy for Him to help

me; but all my praying is in vain." Do not utter any such complaint. Be silent; believe; hope.

As surely as the long cold winter is followed by spring, and all grows green again and blossoms, and the air is full of joy and song, so surely will you some day perceive that God did not leave a single sigh of yours unheeded, even when it seemed plain that He was deaf to your petitions. Often it happens that we are gray-haired when the answer comes to some prayer that we offered in youth; and it may be that the requests we make in our old age will be granted in another world. God is more far-seeing than you or I.

Dearly Beloved! It is a great trial to find so many men of our day rejecting prayer. They are ashamed to pray even at the death-bed of companions and relatives, or at the grave of the dear departed. And it is greatly to be regretted that in numerous families the practice of common prayer has quite died out. Apparently it is no longer good form to say one's prayers.

The greatest pity of all is that there are wives and mothers who totally neglect the duty of prayer. One of the most ominous signs of these present evil days is the appearance of the irreligious mother. The mother who fails to teach the child

at her bosom to pray is its greatest enemy, for she is depriving it of its sole support amid the afflictions of later life.

To pray, dearly Beloved, means to believe in God, that is, to believe in the existence of a Supreme Being, Creator of heaven and earth, who watches and guides man's progress towards his destiny, both in things temporal and things eternal. This belief is the source of all true comfort.

To cease to pray means to reject this belief and to deprive oneself of all consolation and hope during the miseries of one's life. It means to do violence to one's reason, to give oneself up to all the doubts and dangers of an ungodly life, and to await one's last hour in a state of frightful indifference.

May Grace avert that worst of all possible dangers, the forsaking of prayer and of God!

Let us pray, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, for prayer is the first and last means of union with God.

Let us pray, for prayer has been taught us by God Himself. Other things He revealed through prophets and apostles, but of this He spoke to us in His own person, and in words that no one else could speak.

Let us pray, for prayer is the noblest activity of our reason.

Let us pray, for prayer is the highest occupation of man.

Let us pray, for prayer is the very breath of our immortal life.

Let us pray, for prayer is the most accessible of all the sources of Grace.

Let us pray, for prayer is the stoutest bulwark of faith.

Let us pray, for prayer is the perennial fountain of trust and peace.

Let us pray also, especially, to Mary the Mother of Grace, since to us also she is " full of grace."

Let us pray, for prayer is our strongest weapon in the battle of life.

Let us pray, for prayer is our unfailing help in every need of life and in our greatest need at the hour of death; for whoso prays well lives well and whoso lives well dies well.

Beloved Brethren! In every age and in every land, the vast majority of mankind has believed that human destiny depends upon, and is directed by, supernatural powers and forces. Hence men have always expected and entreated help and comfort and hope from the other world. True help, true comfort and true hope, first came to mankind when,—in the words of the Apostle,—" The Grace of God our Savior appeared to all men." (Tit. ii, 11.)

With this in view, we understand that, in a certain sense, everything in heaven and earth is a sort of "grace." The creation of the world is a "grace"; and so is its preservation. Man's physical life, and indeed, every breath he draws is a "grace." And in Paradise, Adam enjoyed higher "graces" than anything that Nature calls for.

After the loss of Paradise, and in the fulness of time, God made a special kingdom of Grace,— the Kingdom of Redemption,— through His Son Who is the source of all supernatural Grace.

In this Kingdom, the Holy Ghost bestows Grace upon us for our sanctification.

Every movement of supernatural life at any time or place,— all faith, all love and all hope of eternal life,— must come from this Grace.

It is Grace which enables millions of men to look to God and to seek Him above all things; which strengthens them to speak, to act, to labor, to endure, to strive, day after day, for the sake of God and eternal life; which makes it possible for them to see in all that happens a help for the attainment of God and everlasting happiness; to eliminate all hope and all fear from their lives, so far as the world is concerned; to resist being led astray, or troubled, by temptations or by doubts; to value human judgments and opinions at their true worth; and to follow God on the upward way, quietly,

humbly, carefully, confident of one day finding a happiness greater than anything attainable here below.

It is Grace, it is the people who are living under its influence, that keep the world going and society in order.

It is this Grace that we daily implore and that by the reception of the Sacraments we can daily nourish and develop. It is all, it gives all, that we need in life or death; and in the next world it will be transformed into Glory.

Christian People! In every age of the world's history, sin and suffering have lain heavily upon mankind. In every corner of the earth, poor wretched men have ever been lifting to Heaven their lamentations and their cries for redemption and pardon. Sin-guiltiness was the idea at the basis of all religions and it was present to the consciousness of all the great poets and sages of antiquity. Everywhere we encounter the same belief, that life is a gift of God and that life has been forfeited by sin.

The heathen knew only an almighty, unmerciful and pitiless god and, as he did not forgive man his sin, so neither did men forgive one another. Their heaven was a gloomy place, and the other world sad, and all over the earth, hatred and oppression and violence ran wild.

Then, when man's misery was at its worst, the people wandering in darkness saw a great light arise over Bethlehem of Juda and it shone bright above the land of shadows. The Sun of Pardon, of Reconciliation, of Grace had arisen. The Word was made Flesh. God became man. He took upon Himself the terrible guilt of all the world and died therefor.

"God indeed, was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself," says the Apostle. (II Cor. v, 19.) And, in another place, he writes: "Even as the Lord hath forgiven you, so do you also." (Coloss. iii, 13.)

A new commandment was given to the world, the commandment to love God and one's neighbor. The stern god of heathendom was transformed into a loving Father who "so loved the world, as to give His Only-Begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in Him, may not perish, but may have life everlasting." (John iii, 16.)

Even at the present hour, this Only-Begotten Son is calling to us, "Come to Me, all you that labor, and are burdened, and I will refresh you." (Matt. xi, 29.)

Even at the present hour, out of His Sacramental fount of Grace, He is giving to every man the water which springeth up into life everlasting.

Even at the present hour, with His Grace, He is

helping every man to bear bravely the burden and the pain of life.

Even at the present hour, He is making death easy with His divine, strength-giving promise: "Every one that liveth and believeth in Me shall not die for ever." (John xi, 26.)

But, to-day, with regard to the love of God, how far away we are from the fulfilling of the mysterious vision of Saint John:

"And every creature, which is in heaven and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them: I heard all saying: To him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, benediction, and honor, and glory, and power, for ever and ever." (Apoc. v, 13.)

As a matter of fact, the prevailing unbelief and religious indifference seem to indicate the approach of the time of which Our Lord spoke when He said: "The Son of Man, when He cometh, shall He find, think you, faith on earth?" (Matt. xviii, 8.) And when He said: "As in the days of Noe, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, even till that day in which Noe entered into the ark. And they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so also shall the coming of the Son of Man be." (Matt. xxiv, 37–39.)

To-day, when God's Grace and God's revelation are despised and denied by many, we see how far mankind has gone astray, how the very foundations of human society have been shaken, and how the world is madly rushing along on its heedless way. As we look out upon that world,— driving into the tempest like a ship without anchor or beacon,— let us, dear brethren, beg the Lord for just one thing, His Grace. Then, come what may, we shall have all we need for living, or for dying. God's Grace is His Power; and He is almighty as well as everlasting. His Grace is His Love; and Love can do all things, for it is stronger than death and it endures forever.

So, let me conclude with the blessing Saint Paul sent to the Corinthians: "The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communication of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen." (II Cor. xiii, 14.)

THE END

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HANSJAKOB, H.

AUTHOR

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